

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 454

By Overbey

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of the late Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds, United States Army, on the occasion of his posthumously receiving Israel's Righteous Among Nations honor.

WHEREAS, our nation was conceived by individuals who were willing to sacrifice their personal safety and concerns to ensure our individual and collective freedom, and the Volunteer State is especially proud to be the home of so many valiant men and women who have served with distinction in the United States armed forces; and

WHEREAS, yet even among these brave soldiers, there are heroes who far exceeded the call of duty, risking their own lives to save the lives of their colleagues in times of war; and

WHEREAS, the late Roddie Edmonds of Knoxville is most assuredly one such hero, a leader among men who saved the lives of some 200 Jewish-American soldiers during World War II; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Edmonds entered the United States Army at the age of twenty-one and quickly became one of the youngest soldiers to earn the rank of master sergeant at the age of twenty-two; and

WHEREAS, he was one of more than 1,200 American soldiers captured by the enemy at the Battle of the Bulge during World War II and was a prisoner of war (POW) for 100 days at two German stalags; and

WHEREAS, at one point, their German captors ordered the Jewish POWs to identify themselves, so that they could be separated from the group and sent to slave labor camps, or even worse, concentration camps, horrible places from which they would not emerge alive; and

WHEREAS, even though he was only twenty-five at the time, Master Sergeant (MSG) Edmonds was a battle-tested veteran of uncommon maturity, and his fellow POWs referred to him as "old man"; and

WHEREAS, as the senior leader of the American POWs, he ordered his men to refuse this command and fall out, telling the German commandant: "We are all Jews here."; and

WHEREAS, when the Nazi officer placed a gun to his head and threatened to execute him, MSG Edmonds merely recited his name, rank, and serial number and told the German he would be forced to kill all the POWs, since they all knew who he was and would ensure that he was tried for war crimes when the Allies declared victory; and

WHEREAS, the German officer relented, and 200 Jewish-American soldiers' lives were saved due to MSG Edmonds's heroic and selfless actions as he faced execution; and

WHEREAS, some seventy years later, MSG Edmonds's heroism in the face of death is being posthumously recognized with Israel's highest honor for non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during World War II and the Holocaust, the Righteous Among Nations designation, which was most famously received by Oskar Schindler, the German manufacturer who saved more than 1,000 Jews; and

WHEREAS, Roddie Edmonds is the first American serviceman to receive the Righteous Among Nations honor and only the fifth American overall; and

WHEREAS, his family will travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in the award ceremony on January 27, 2016, which is most appropriately Holocaust Remembrance Day; and

WHEREAS, after World War II, Mr. Edmonds also served in Korea, but eventually returned home to Knoxville as an average guy, who was "a friend to everybody, full of life"; he worked in sales and at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and he and his wife, Mary Ann, raised two sons, Chris and Mike; and

WHEREAS, he passed away in 1985, but his legacy lives on through the progeny of some 200 Jewish Americans who would not be with us except for Roddie Edmonds's courageous stand against the evil of the Nazis; and

WHEREAS, there are many more examples of MSG Edmonds's maturity, leadership, selflessness, and bravery as a POW; he successfully encouraged his starving men to refuse German orders to leave the stalag, and days later they were liberated by the Third Army; he prayed with his men as they endured intensive bombing while locked in a cattle car with no food

or facilities, and they miraculously survived; and he hid money in the lining of his clothes so that he could buy cigarettes and food for his men; and

WHEREAS, Roddie Edmonds was an exceptional member of this nation's greatest generation, our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, who saved the free world from totalitarianism and made possible the America of today, and he should be posthumously recognized on this special occasion; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of the late Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds, United States Army, on the occasion of his posthumously receiving Israel's Righteous Among Nations honor and commemorate his heroism in saving the lives of the Jewish soldiers under his command during World War II.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.